

# Dairsie and Archbishop Spottiswoode

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The church of St Mary, Dairsie, stands on a bluff overlooking the River Eden. The location of the church, and its related castle and bridge, is the result of a long historical process. The modern parish of Dairsie lies six miles west of St Andrews. It is about three and a half miles long from east to west and two miles from north to south. The southern and eastern boundary of the parish is the River Eden. To the north the land rises to two hills, Craiglug and Foodie Hill. The gently sloping, south-facing lands which stretch from these hills to the river form the basis of the parish's agricultural prosperity. The agricultural centre of the parish was the Foodies: Foodie, Middle Foodie, Craigfoodie and Easter and Wester Craigfoodie. The village of Dairsie or Osna-burgh is a nineteenth-century creation.

Dairsie first appears in written record c 1160 when the church with its appurtenances were granted by Bishop Arnold of St Andrews to his Augustinian cathedral chapter. At the same time the bishop added a carucate from his demesne land at Dairsie.<sup>1</sup> Among the witnesses to this donation was Macmallothem, thane of Dairsie. The appearance of this official provides a clue to the ancient status of Dairsie as an agricultural and administrative unit. Thanages in Scotland were often pre-Christian land units into which later Christian sites were fitted, often well away from the important agricultural centre of the thanage.<sup>2</sup> At Dairsie the church is located on the southern extremity of the parish. In common with other thanages the thane of Dairsie may have originally represented the rights of the crown at Dairsie. By the twelfth century, however, it is clear that the bishops of St Andrews and the earls of Fife also had long-established rights at Dairsie. The fast-moving waters of the Eden meant that from very early times mills were established along its banks. The earliest record of such a mill occurs in the 1180s when Bishop Hugh reached an agreement with Earl Duncan of Fife, in which the bishop was given lands for a mill within the episcopal demesne, described as the kirkland.<sup>3</sup> The teinds of the mill were paid to the church of Dairsie, perhaps to pay the stipend of the earliest recorded incumbent, William, who appears c 1170-1199.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *St Andrews Liber*, 128.

<sup>2</sup> G. W. S. Barrow, "Pre-feudal Scotland: Shires and Thanages", *Kingdom of the Scots*, London, 1973, 63.

<sup>3</sup> *St Andrews Liber*, 353.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-5, 120.

Not only the bishop had rights in Dairsie, so had the Augustinian cathedral chapter of St Andrews. Throughout the thirteenth century there were attempts to define the respective rights of bishop and chapter at Dairsie. The chapter claimed the right of patronage of the church, but on at least one occasion in the thirteenth century the bishop was able to present one of his clerks to the living.<sup>5</sup> Despite papal confirmation of the chapter's right of presentation in 1246, the question of patronage remained unclear until it was specifically resigned to the chapter by Bishop Lamberton in 1301.<sup>6</sup> Under the energetic leadership of Prior John Haddington the chapter had reorganised and improved their lands at Dairsie in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. In 1288, for example, Gilbert of Balass had allowed the priory to have a pond for their mill on his lands on the south side of the Eden: a reorganisation commemorated in the surviving placename, New Mill.<sup>7</sup>

After the devastation of the war of independence Bishop Lamberton rebuilt his seat at Dairsie, probably on a fairly lavish scale.<sup>8</sup> On 15th-16th July 1316 the residence was the venue for the settlement of a long-standing dispute between Holyrood and Newbattle Abbeys.<sup>9</sup> The bishop's manor was by now the permanent seat of the bishop's local administrator, the baillie of Dairsie. The baillie first appears in 1329 in the vacancy following the death of Bishop Lamberton when he made payments to the crown of wheat, oats and malt from the episcopal estate of Dairsie.<sup>10</sup>

The later medieval history of Dairsie is obscure until in the early sixteenth century Archbishop Andrew Forman made David Lermouth of Clatto laird of Dairsie in return for his family's service to the archbishops of St Andrews as baillie and customer and justice-general.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, until the Reformation, the family had held the office of provost of St Andrews in almost unbroken succession over 140 years. The Reformation initially made little difference to the Lermouth's tradition of service, although Sir Patrick sold the office of customer in 1578.<sup>12</sup> It was only in the 1580s that the Lermouths began to experience difficulties as the patrimony of the archbishops fell into lay hands. They compensated for this change by remaining conspicuously loyal to

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 92, 120.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 339-40.

<sup>8</sup> G. Martine, *Reliquiae Divi Andreae*, St Andrews, 1797, 228.

<sup>9</sup> *Holyrood Liber*, no. 92; *Newbattle Registrum*, no. 161.

<sup>10</sup> *Exchequer Rolls*, i, 137, 145-7.

<sup>11</sup> Martine, *Reliquiae*, 78, 85.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. The year before he had become baillie to the priory. *Ibid.*, 172.



**Plate I—Dairsie Bridge and Church**



**Plate II—Dairsie Church and Castle, c. 1790 by Prof. J. Cook  
(St Andrews University Library)**





Plate III—Midcalder Church, south façade with priest's door



Plate IV—Dairsie, south façade

the Scottish crown. When James VI escaped from his Ruthven captors at Falkland palace in 1583 he came first to Dairsie where he was received by the Lermonths before being conveyed to St Andrews.<sup>13</sup>

By the end of the sixteenth century Lord Lindsay had acquired all the Lermonths' heritable offices in the regality of St Andrews.<sup>14</sup> The Lermonth link with Dairsie ended in 1616 when Archbishop John Spottiswoode purchased the estate, which his second son, Captain John Spottiswoode, held of him. In 1619 the church and parish of Dairsie were resigned to Captain Spottiswoode by Ludovik duke of Lennox.<sup>15</sup> Lennox had obtained the lands and rights of the archbishopric of St Andrews in 1593.<sup>16</sup>

The present-day appearance of Dairsie castle and church is due to Archbishop Spottiswoode's rebuilding. John Spottiswoode was born in 1565, the son of the reformed minister of Midcalder and superintendent of Lothian. He was educated at Glasgow University under James and Andrew Melville and at 18 succeeded to his father's charge at Midcalder. In 1601 he accompanied the family's patron, the duke of Lennox, as chaplain on an embassy to the court of Henry IV of France. On his return in 1603 Spottiswoode and Lennox were presented to Queen Elizabeth. Following her death Spottiswoode accompanied King James to London. On the death of Archbishop Beaton of Glasgow in 1603 Spottiswoode was appointed his successor, although he did not receive episcopal ordination until 1610. At the death of Archbishop Gledstanes in 1615 he was translated to St Andrews.

Despite his prominence in the affairs of his time the archbishop remains a rather enigmatic figure. His famous *History of the Church of Scotland* is, unlike Knox's *History*, singularly unrevealing about the personality of its author.<sup>17</sup> At various points in his career, however, it is possible to gain an insight into some of John Spottiswoode's political and religious convictions.

He had been born into what may be called the mainstream of the Reformed Church in Scotland. His father, after an initial disenchantment with a career in the church, had gone to London where (in the words of his son) he met Archbishop Cranmer and:

was by his means brought to the knowledge of the truth.  
Soon after the death of King James the Fifth, he returned

<sup>13</sup> Sir James Melville of Halhill, *Memoirs of his own Life*, Bannatyne Club, 1827, 287.

<sup>14</sup> Martine, *Reliquiae*, 173.

<sup>15</sup> City of Edinburgh District Archives, Protocol Book of John Hay, v, 187. The grant included the parsonage, vicarage with manse and glebe.

<sup>16</sup> *Reg. Mag. Sig.*, v, no. 2273; Martine, *Reliquiae*, 152.

<sup>17</sup> For a modern assessment of Spottiswoode the historian, see M. Lee, "Archbishop Spottiswoode as Historian", *Journal of British Studies*, xiii (i), 138-50.

to Scotland, and stayed a long time with Alexander, earl of Glencarne, who was known to be affected that way. In his company he came to be acquainted with Matthew, earl of Lennox, and was by him employed towards King Henry the Eighth. . . . Matters succeeding to the earl of Lennox his mind, and he settled in England, he remained with him some months; after which, longing to visit his friends, he returned, and being known to Sir James Sandilands of Calder . . . he was by him moved to accept the parsonage of Calder. . . .<sup>18</sup>

He seems only to have become regularly resident at Calder after the Reformation. Towards the end of his life his father became more disenchanted with the extremists in the church:

He continually foretold, that the ministers by their follies would bring religion in hazard . . . [and] therefore wished some to be placed in authority over them to keep them in awe; "for the doctrine", said he, "we profess is good, but the old policy was undoubtedly the better. . . ." <sup>19</sup>

Whatever the element of hindsight in Archbishop Spottiswoode's account of his father's career it is possible to see elements of continuity from father to son: the influence of the Lennox family and the belief in the necessity for men to be placed in authority over ministers "to keep them in awe". Spottiswoode's father had feared that the king might be diverted from the truth by these radical ministers. Here the son went beyond the father. By the turn of the century Spottiswoode was not only "a believer in episcopacy, but also in monarchy, a spokesman for the doctrine of the divine right of kings".<sup>20</sup> But Spottiswoode was also a realist. Throughout his long career of service to the crown he was constantly called upon to try to amend the desires and actions of his royal masters when he felt they were incompatible with the realities of the situation.

At Dairsie Archbishop Spottiswoode left a statement in stone about the history of his times and the role he played in them. The first clue to Spottiswoode's outlook lies in the archbishop's purchase of the estate and his son's later acquisition of the church. The estate was intended to provide for his family, but through the patronage of his old mentor, Lennox, he was able to acquire the heart of the ancient bishop's and archbishop's patrimony of Dairsie. The acquisition of Dairsie was an official act as much as it was a family one.

Spottiswoode set about restoring and rebuilding. The bridge at

<sup>18</sup> J. Spottiswoode, *History of the Church of Scotland*, ii, Spottiswoode Society, 1851, 336.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>20</sup> Lee, "Spottiswoode", 143.



Dairsie had previously been restored by Archbishop James Beaton (1521-39) whose arms appear on the south-east side of the bridge (Plate I).<sup>21</sup> Spottiswoode rebuilt the north-eastern side of the bridge where corbelling bonded the span of the bridge to the parapet. This corbelling is also found in the archbishop's additions to the castle and on the tower of the church.

The castle which Spottiswoode inherited probably dated from the fourteenth century. The Lermonth castle was a plain rectangular tower house of two floors above a stone-vaulted ground floor. Spottiswoode added two circular towers at the south-east and north-west corners to turn the plan into a Z-plan castle. The square chambers on the tops of the rounded towers were supported on corbelling similar to that used on the bridge. The stylistic bonding of the towers into the older structure is achieved by a decorative string course.

It is possible to gain some idea of Dairsie as it appeared in Spottiswoode's time through the watercolour drawings of Professor John Cook of St Andrews, executed in the 1790s (Plate II). In one of his drawings the castle is shown as half unroofed with the north-west tower still entire. In the other drawing (reproduced with this article) the church and castle appear much as they do today except that the original parapet and flat roof shown in the drawing have since been replaced by a pitched roof.

The church Spottiswoode built is probably located on the site of the original church. It is a single rectangle, 77½ feet long by 31 feet wide. In this apparently simple plan, however, Spottiswoode built a comment on the complex times in which he lived as well as a statement of his own beliefs. The date of the church is 1621. In this year the observance of the Five Articles of Perth was enjoined by the Scottish Parliament despite Spottiswoode's apprehensions about the effect this measure would have. Spottiswoode was not a supporter of the public application of the Five Articles, as the sermon he preached before the Perth Synod in 1618 makes clear.<sup>22</sup> But Spottiswoode was the king's man and would do what his royal master directed despite his own misgivings. It may be that by 1621 the archbishop knew that enforcement of the Five Articles would mean the ruin of many of his hopes for the church in Scotland. Certainly this state of mind seems to be reflected in Dairsie church.

The church was built at the archbishop's own expense primarily for use as his private chapel. Its design owed a good deal to the early influences on Spottiswoode's life. The burial crypt under the east end may have owed something to Spottiswoode's period at Glasgow where the crypt-shrine of St Mungo was built under the east end of the cathedral. A more direct link comes from

<sup>21</sup> *Hist. Mon. Comm. (Fife)*, 177.

<sup>22</sup> *Spottiswoode Miscellany*, 1, Spottiswoode Society, 1844, 65ff.

Spottiswoode's connection with the late medieval church of Midcalder, with its bays divided by buttresses and its large and elaborate traceried windows. At Midcalder the insertion of the priest's door meant the level of the window had to be raised (Plate III). The Midcalder door is surmounted by a decorative, strong course which encircles the entire building. These architectural themes are repeated at Dairsie in the treatment of the now blocked-up private entrance on the south side (Plate IV).

Another influence may be traced in the details of the Scottish renaissance doorway at the east end. At Dairsie the columns surrounding the door are carved in relief and are thin and amateurish in execution (Plate V). The panel bearing the date of the church sits very uneasily under a too-heavy sill bearing the frame of the armorial cartouche. The archbishop's coat of arms stands out from this rather crude group of architectural details as a highly sophisticated piece of work. The coat of arms contains the three trees of the Spottiswoode family. Set into the panel is a metal plate with the motto, "Dilexi Decorum Domus Tuae", an apparent reference to the text of Psalm 26: 8, "I have loved the habitation of thy house". The substitution of the word *decorum*, with its meanings-of beautiful, becoming, adorned, is singularly appropriate to the kind of adornment the archbishop placed within this church. Immediately above this panel the metal initials of the archbishop, "I S", are set into the stone. To either side of these initials are small round holes, which probably held a pair of small crossed crosier staffs. They were removed c. 1646 when the church was cleansed of its prelatical relics (see below, p. 132).<sup>23</sup> The inspiration of this extraordinary processional doorway (called the "great east door" by the presentatives of the Synod of Fife) was the doorway of the Chapel Royal at Stirling Castle (Plate VI). The Chapel Royal was built in 1594 for the baptism of Prince Henry. Its use as a model for Dairsie is evidence of Spottiswoode's close identification with his royal master, James VI and I.

Perhaps the most remarkable external feature of Dairsie church as it survives today are its windows. These are large Gothic lights filled with extraordinary plate tracery. These windows are original and represent a not very successful attempt to build in the Gothic style.<sup>24</sup> Another surviving "Gothic" feature are the gargoyles set into the wallheads on the north and south sides of the church to serve as water spouts. These would have been necessary because of the original flat roof on the church (Plates II, IV). The flat roof remained until the end of the eighteenth century and is mentioned in the account of the parish in the *Old Statistical Account*. The

<sup>23</sup> *Selection from the Minutes of the Synod of Fife*, Abbotsford Club, 1837, 129.

<sup>24</sup> G. Hay, *Architecture of Scottish Post-Reformation Churches*, Oxford, 1957, 43-4. Cook's drawing shows they pre-date the two known remodellings of the kirk in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *Ibid.*, 256.



wallhead was surmounted by a castellated parapet. This parapet had been taken down and a pitched roof built by 1803 when a print of the church was published at Cupar showing the new roofline.<sup>25</sup> The join of the parapet to the tower can still be seen (Plate IV).

Dairsie was built as Spottiswoode's private chapel and its style was determined by the archbishop's beliefs about the role of churches as houses for the kind of worship he thought was seemly. The attempt to use Gothic motifs in the external architecture indicates a vestigial feeling that Gothic was still the most suitable style for worship based on historic models. Spottiswoode has left an account of the sort of worship he felt was the most suitable, in his will of 1639:

For matters of rite and government, my judgement is and hath been, that the most simple, decent, and humble rites should be chused, such as is the bowing of the knee in resaving the Holy Sacrament, and others of that kinde, prophanes being as dangerouse to religion as superstition; and touching the government of the Church, I am verily persuaded that the government Episcopall is the only right and Apostolicque forme.<sup>26</sup>

This belief in rites based on historic practices was fully expressed in the interior of the church. Spottiswoode's interest in the liturgical uses of churches is indicated by his writing of the introduction of the Edinburgh edition of Sir Henry Spelman's *De Non Temerandis Ecclesiis: of the rights and respect due to Churches* (1616).<sup>27</sup> George Hay suggests that Dairsie was a "model kirk" for a kind of "ecclesiological movement"<sup>28</sup> but this view should be modified. Dairsie was a private, almost introverted, kirk. Despite all the stylistic influences at work on the facade, it was the interior that really mattered. Although nothing survives of the original fittings except the entrance door to the bell-tower stair, it is possible to gain an idea of the appearance of the interior from the accounts of the cleansing of the church in the 1640s. At a meeting of the Synod of Fife at Dysart on 5th October 1641 to enquire into superstitious monuments in churches under their care, Master Patrick Scougal, minister of Dairsie, reported that there were sundry crosses within the church, which "be some wes not thoght to be superstitious".<sup>29</sup> The Synod ordered several of their number to look into this question, as well as burials within the kirk. In the following year, after a deputation had visited the church, it was further reported

<sup>25</sup> R. Sibbald, *History of Fife and Kinross*, Cupar-Fife, 1803, 400.

<sup>26</sup> Spottiswoode, *History*, i, cxxxi.

<sup>27</sup> Hay, *Architecture*, 44.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Fife Synod*, 127.

that there were also various kneeling desks at the raised east end and crosier staffs above the door in addition to "a glorious partition wall" dividing the body of the church from the choir, on which were displayed the royal arms of Scotland and England "with divers crosses about and beside them".<sup>30</sup> The partition wall was ordered to be taken down by the heritors.<sup>31</sup> In 1645 the Synod, meeting at Dunfermline, found that nothing had yet been done (perhaps due to resistance by the Spottiswoode family) and ordered that the wall was to be taken down and the choir levelled.<sup>32</sup> Apparently this time the Synod's wishes were obeyed for Dairsie does not appear again in its minutes.

Archbishop Spottiswoode had been forced into exile after the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant in 1638. After hearing of the signing he is said to have remarked: "Now all that we have been doing these thirty years is thrown down at once."<sup>33</sup> But even in exile he did not forget Dairsie. The final provision of his will makes this clear:

Lastlie, submitting myself with all humilitie to the good pleasures of my most mercifull God, I humbly commit my soule in his handis, and if it fall out that I doe end my dayis without the country, I desire, if any way it may be commodiously done, that my corps be transported into Scotland and interred besides my wyf, qhere I appointed the same to be layd in the church of Dairsiy, which I will to be done without all maner of pompe, and in the presence of a few loving friends, with the greatest secrecy that may be. And if it shall be God his good pleasure to return me home, the like course I desire to be kept in my burial. If otherwise, the good will of my God be done.<sup>34</sup>

Spottiswoode's wishes could not be carried out. He was buried in Westminster Abbey on 26th November 1639. Spottiswoode's eldest son, John, inherited Spottiswoode's lands north of the Forth and continued laird of Dairsie. Both he and his brother, Sir Robert, were to die for the royalist cause. Sir Robert Spottiswoode, Lord Newabbey, joined Montrose at the outbreak of war and, although a non-combatant, was captured at Philiphaugh and condemned to death. He was executed in the market place of St Andrews on 16th January 1646. John Spottiswoode, laird of Dairsie, was executed as a royalist in 1650. The family connection with Dairsie was ended. It had lasted 35 years.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 129. The synod also ordered the ending of burials within the kirk and especially mention a burial in the east end of the church which may be Rachel Spottiswoode's tomb.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>33</sup> Spottiswoode, *History*, i, cx.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, cxxxiii.

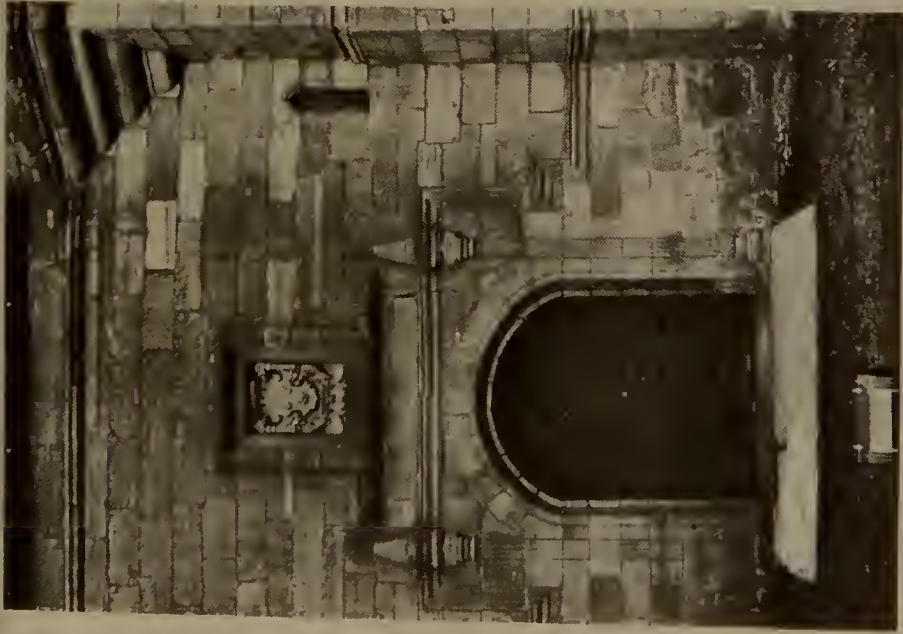


Plate V—Dairsie, west doorway

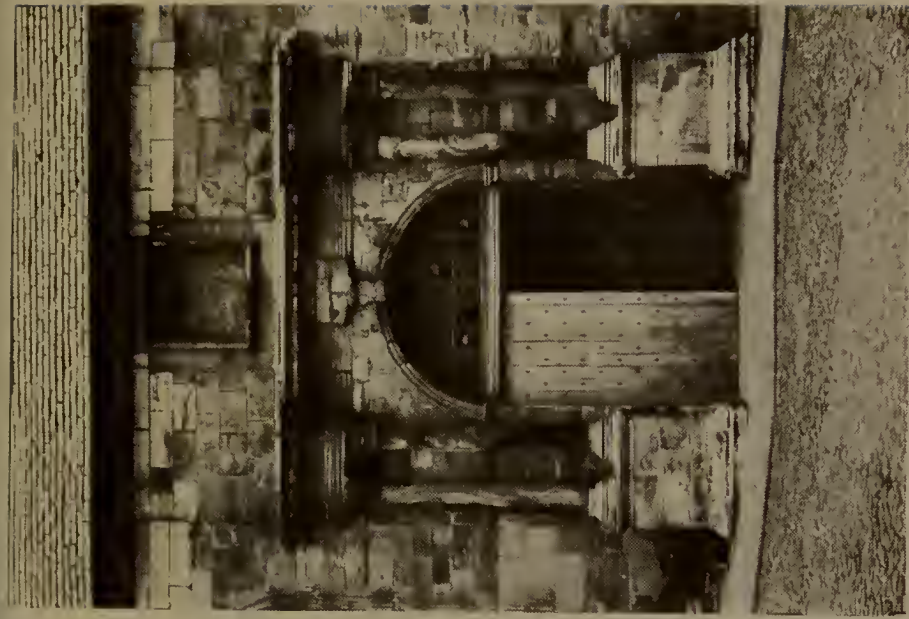


Plate VI—Chapel Royal, Stirling, doorway



